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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001813

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2019
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SUBJECT: UK REPORTS SOME KURDISH LEADERS AMENABLE TO
DELAYING CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM

REF: BAGHDAD 1702

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reason 1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: UK Foreign Office Director for the Middle East, Frank Baker, told the Ambassador July 2 that some senior Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials in Erbil expressed support for delaying the referendum on the Kurdistan Region Constitution until after January 2010. Baker said he believes that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani is the main obstacle to postponing the referendum. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On July 1 Baker met with KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister (D/PM) Barham Salih to discuss the proposed July 25 referendum on the Kurdistan Region Constitution. According to Baker, both said they could support postponing the constitutional referendum until ¶2010.

¶3. (C) Baker identified President Masoud Barzani as the main problem regarding postponing the referendum. Baker explained that President Barzani feels that he has continually given ground (on subjects like delaying the Iraqi Constitution's Article 140 process) and received nothing in return. Baker speculated that Masoud may be seeking to stake out an extreme position that he can use as an opening negotiating position when dealing with the new Government of Iraq (GOI) that emerges from the January 2010 national elections.

¶4. (C) Baker said that both Nechirvan Barzani and Salih told him they believe that this strategy of pushing the Kurdistan Region Constitution to a referendum July 25 could actually strengthen GOI PM Maliki, who could use it to whip up anti-Kurd feeling in the run up to national elections. Both also cautioned that Masoud's approach will harm the potential for compromise and potentially destroy UNAMI's Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) process.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador said that Baker's assessment of D/PM Salih conformed with our own: Salih's stance on possible conflicts between the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi Constitutions has softened from his earlier rigidity. Baker's report on Nechirvan's and Salih's remarks reinforces what Sunni Arab Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leader Osama Tikriti told us (reported septel). Baker viewed the participation of Maliki's representatives in UNAMI's High Level Task Force (HLTF) as part of his political strategy of keeping options open with the Kurds, and demonstrating to other potential coalition partners that he can use the talks for political gain in upcoming elections.
HILL